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THE HOME CHICKEN FLOCK



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Tifton, Georgia

THE HOME CHICKEN FLOCK

The home chicken flock usually is kept for egg production. It should provide fresh eggs during most of the year.

Before you decide to start a laying flock, you should find out about the zoning ordinances in your area; if you live in a large city or a suburb, they may forbid poultry keeping.

HOUSES

No particular type of poultry house is best. Local conditions determine the house that will give good results. The poultry department of your State college of agriculture can recommend the type most suitable for your area. Prefabricated houses are available; one of these may be a good investment.

A square or rectangular house usually is more satisfactory than houses of other shapes. A small house can be about 6 feet high in front and 5 feet high at the back. Pole-type houses are usually 5 to 7 feet high at the sides and 10 feet high at the center.

Ordinarily, for a small house, a shed-roof house is the most economical to build. Most shedroofs have a pitch of one to three or less. Pole-type houses have a gable roof and cost less for medium to large houses. The roof should have a pitch of one to three, or more.

The deeper the house, the less danger that drafts will reach birds roosting at the rear. A depth of at least 10 feet is desirable in a small house for both winter and summer comfort. Construction costs per square foot decrease as buildings are widened, because less foundation and wall are involved for each square foot of enclosed space. The labor required for the care of the hens is less in wider buildings. Larger houses should be about 30 feet wide and may be any length.

The number of windows and openings and the amount of ventilation needed depend on the climate. You should insulate the roof, at least, to make the house more comfortable in both summer and winter.

Frames covered with glass substitutes can be used to close part or all of the openings during winter. The glass substitutes, if kept clean, admit ultraviolet rays of the sun.

The size and breed of the flock determines the size of the house. Allow 3 square feet per bird for Leghorns or Leghorn-type strain crosses and 4 square feet per bird for medium-weight breeds—Plymouth Rocks, Rhode Island Reds, or New Hampshires.

The henhouse floor may be concrete, boards, or dirt. Concrete makes the most satisfactory floor because it is sanitary and durable; board floors are also satisfactory. Houses that have concrete or board floors can be cleaned more easily than those that have dirt floors. If you plan a dirt floor for your henhouse, make sure that the foundation is ratproof.

If you use boards for flooring, install them at least 12 inches off the ground. This will prevent dampness and rotting. Floors built this high off the ground

also discourage rats from living under the henhouse.

Cover the floor with several inches of absorbent litter—wood shavings, sawdust, straw, or a commercial litter.

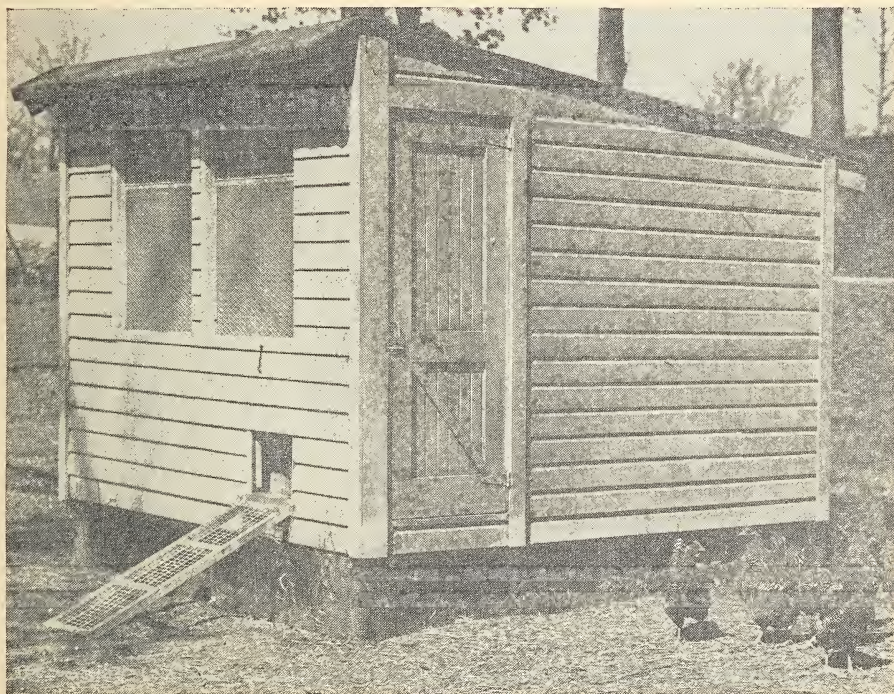
A system of built-up litter can be used. Put litter in the house early in the fall; add to it and stir it frequently until the droppings become well mixed. When litter is 6 to 8 inches deep and is dry, it needs no attention other than an occasional stirring. Parts of the litter that get damp and dirty should be replaced. Remove all litter at the end of the laying year.

Laying hens may be kept indoors the year round. Hens confined to the house will lay well and stay healthy if they have comfortable, well-ventilated houses and are fed adequate rations.

EQUIPMENT

Most of the equipment for your henhouse can be made in the home workshop or purchased at low cost. The things you must provide for your flock are roosts, nests, a small coop, a feed hopper, a water container, and lights. You will also need a brooder if you start the flock with chicks. The sale of day-old chicks from hatcheries has largely done away with small incubators for home flocks. If started pullets are purchased, there will be no need for brooding equipment.

- Locate roosts at the rear of the house, away from front openings. Place them about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the floor and about 14 inches apart, on center. Roosts are usually made of 2-



Shedroof henhouse for a small flock.

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by 4-inch or 2- by 2-inch pieces of wood. The upper corners should be slightly rounded. Allow 8 inches of roost space for Leghorns and 10 inches for other breeds.

- Place droppings boards 8 inches beneath the roosts. Make the boards 20 inches wide for one roost and 34 inches wide for two roosts. The boards should be smooth and free of cracks. Clean the boards at least twice a week or provide wire netting just under the roost poles to keep birds out of droppings collected on the boards.

A droppings pit is often used instead of boards. Cover the pit with heavy wire netting to prevent birds and rats from getting into it. Remove droppings often enough to prevent objectionable odor.

- Provide a nest for every four hens in the flock. Nests for Leghorns should be 12 inches square and 12 inches high. For other breeds, make nests 14 inches wide, 14 inches high, and 12 inches deep. Nests may be placed on the end walls or on partitions. They should be high enough so that the hens can

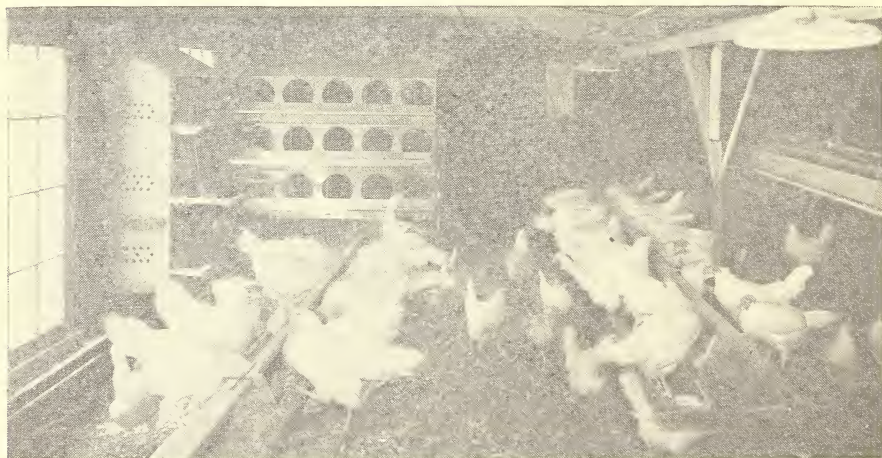
“work” under them. Usually nests are arranged in tiers.

- Use a coop made with a slat or wire bottom to confine broody hens in the spring to break up their desire to set. It should hang at least 2 feet above the floor. This coop is also useful at other times for any birds that must be separated from the flock for special treatment.

- Feed—mash, crumbles, or pellets—should be placed in easily accessible wasteproof hoppers.

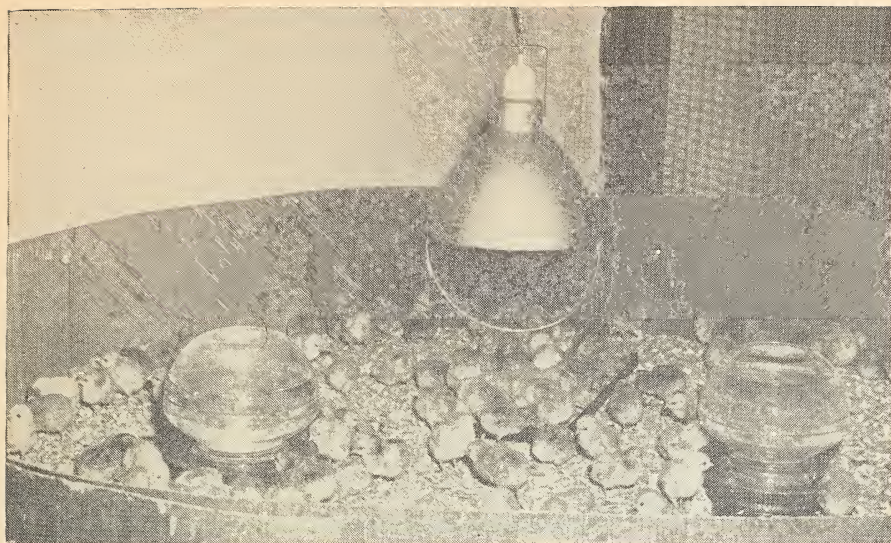
- Clean water is important in the hen's ration. Hang an automatic waterer at an easily accessible height or use an adequate galvanized pail or pan on a small platform to hold the water supply. The top of the pail should be about 18 inches above the floor, to keep straw and dirt from getting into the water. Place a wire protector over the waterer or pail so that the birds cannot get their feet into the water.

- Most poultrymen use artificial lights in the laying house to give pullets a 14-hour day during the winter



BN-10604-X

A convenient way to arrange equipment in the henhouse.



BN-10603-X

A convenient chick brooder.

months.¹ Using lights helps increase the number of eggs laid during the fall and winter months—when prices are highest—and keeps the birds in good condition. Usually, lights are used for pullets only from October 1 through February or March.

Place 60-watt electric lamps, equipped with 12-inch reflectors, 4 to 5 feet above the floor. Provide one lamp for each 200 square feet of floor space. Lights may be used in the morning or both morning and evening. Automatic devices generally are used to control the lights. With evening lights, some method of gradually dimming the light is necessary to induce the hens to go on the roosts *before* the henhouse is totally dark.

¹Further information on using artificial light for more winter eggs may be obtained from your county agricultural agent or from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

STARTING THE FLOCK

You can start your flock with hatching eggs, day-old chicks, started chicks, or partly grown, well-developed pullets.

Usually it is best to buy partly grown or well-developed pullets. The time and trouble in incubating and brooding chicks is not worthwhile when small numbers of pullets are raised, unless it is a hobby.

Eight to 15 birds should provide the average family with a liberal supply of eggs for most of the year.

Some breeds suitable for a home flock kept for egg production are:

New Hampshires.

Plymouth Rocks.

Rhode Island Reds.

White Leghorns and first-generation, egg-production strain crosses and crossbreds.

Plymouth Rocks and Reds, both medium-weight breeds, have brown

eggs. If bred for high egg production, they lay well. They are also desirable for meat.²

Cages for Laying Hens

Cages are seldom used for small flocks of laying hens. However, hens in cages lay about as well as those kept on the floor in well-built houses.

Keeping each hen in a separate compartment prevents cannibalism and competition between individuals. These traits are often causes of poor performance when laying flocks are kept on the floor.

The cage method requires special equipment, and the per-hen investment is greater than keeping hens on the floor.

Feed hens in cages according to the directions given by your feed manufacturer.

FEEDING

Most people who keep a small flock of chickens use commercially prepared feeds. These feeds usually are of excellent quality. Follow the feeding directions of the manufacturer.

Growing diets may be all mash or grain with mash. A complete ration is usually fed to home flocks. It may be fed in mash, crumble, or pellet form. If grain is also fed, insoluble granite grit should be made available. Grain usually is fed late in the afternoon. Keep dry feed in a hopper before the

birds all the time. Unless adequate calcium is already in the feed, oyster shell or hen-size limestone grit should be made available.

Waste products from the kitchen and garden may be fed, but they should not replace other feeds. Feed only amounts that the flock will clean up in 5 to 10 minutes, once a day.

Be careful in your choice of waste feeds. House scraps and peelings and green tops from vegetables are excellent. But onions, fruit peels, and leftover salads saturated with salad dressing may give undesirable flavors to eggs and meat. Potato peelings should be cooked before you feed them to chickens.

MAINTAINING HEALTH

If a disease breaks out in your flock, consult your county agricultural agent or feed supplier. Give a complete description of the symptoms and of the conditions under which the flock is kept.

To reduce losses, remove sick birds. If treatment of sick birds is advisable, keep them confined while you treat them. Often it is better to kill the affected birds and then burn or bury them.

Sanitation is important in keeping down diseases and parasites in poultry flocks.³ Some measures you can use are—

• Providing houses that are comfortable, well ventilated, well lighted, and free from drafts and dampness.

³Further information on insect pests and diseases that affect chickens may be obtained from your county agricultural agent or from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

²Detailed information on incubation and brooding of chickens may be obtained from your county agricultural agent or from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

- Keeping the poultry house clean.
- Scraping the floor of the house and cleaning and disinfecting it at least once a year.
- Inspecting your flock regularly for mites and lice.

Apply an insecticide if the birds are infested. Several insecticides are effective for treating infested chickens. Some can be applied as roost paints; others are used as sprays, dips, or dusts.

CAUTION: Insecticides used improperly can be injurious to man and animals. Use them only when needed and handle them with care. Follow the directions and heed all precautions on the labels.

PRESERVING EGGS

You can preserve your surplus eggs by refrigeration or freezing. When properly prepared for storage, fresh eggs may be kept for 6 to 9 months.

Refrigeration

Eggs laid during March, April, and May usually keep better than eggs laid later in the year.

Only fresh eggs with sound, strong shells should be preserved in the shell. Any that are soiled, cracked, or even slightly checked should not be stored.

Wash the shells. Then, coat them with clean mineral oil. You can apply the oil by dipping the eggs.

For dipping, warm the oil to thin it; have the oil no hotter than your hand can stand.

Eggs keep best if they are oiled within 24 hours after they are laid. Put several eggs in a wire basket, dip the basket, then allow the excess oil to drain off. Pack the oiled eggs in clean baskets, cases, or cartons and store them in a refrigerator or a cool cellar.

Properly oiled eggs have thick whites when broken after storage. The thick white is a sign that the oiling process

Raising Bantams

Bantams are miniatures of standard breeds. They require only a small house and consume much less feed than larger birds, but lay fewer and smaller eggs. Their small size appeals to many and they are frequently kept for show and as pets.

Adult bantams consume 20 to 25 pounds of feed a year. Their eggs vary in size and weigh 11 to 16 ounces per dozen.

If you do not have a chickenhouse, you can build a small version of the house described on page 2. The house should be at least 3 feet 10 inches wide

by 4 feet 6 inches deep, 5 feet 6 inches high in front, and 4 feet 5 inches high in the rear.

The attached, covered run should be the same width as the house and 5 feet deep. The front of the run should be 2 feet 8 inches high, and where it is attached to the house, 3 feet high.

A house of this size will accommodate 6 to 10 hens and a rooster. Wire-floored sun porches may be used for young bantams and mature birds. Cover the yard beneath the sunporch with gravel or cinders to aid in keeping it sanitary.

was correct and storage conditions were ideal. Eggs poorly covered with oil or oiled too late will have watery whites. Oiled eggs are sometimes difficult to peel when hard boiled. To minimize this problem, hardcook oiled eggs in water that maintains a rolling boil.

Freezing

To freeze whole-egg mixtures, break the eggs and thoroughly mix the yolk and white.

Use an electric mixer at low speed to avoid incorporating any more air than necessary. No further treatment is needed. Pour the whole egg mixture into convenient-size containers and freeze.

For frozen, separated whites and yolks, separate the eggs in the usual way. Be careful to avoid getting any yolk into the whites; their whipping ability will be lost if yolk is mixed in. Mix the whites to a smooth consistency but avoid any foaming.

Freeze in a suitable container. The

frozen, separated yolks will gel unless salt or sugar is added when they are mixed. Add 1 teaspoon of salt to each cup of yolks or 2 tablespoons of sugar, corn sirup, or honey. Remember to allow for the added ingredients when using frozen yolks in recipes.

Culling the Laying Flock

As pullets begin laying, keep only those that appear healthy and vigorous. Remove poor layers as the laying year progresses. The appearance of the comb and wattles and the condition of the pubic bones, abdomen, and vent are good indicators of laying condition.⁴

In a good layer, the comb and wattles will be full and bright red, the pubic bones thin and wide apart, the abdomen soft and deep, and the vent large and moist.

⁴ Further information on culling hens may be obtained from your county agricultural agent or from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.



Use Pesticides Safely
FOLLOW THE LABEL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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